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**A Youthful Adventure with a Disappearing Quebec Beauty**

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Last summer 15 young men joined the small number of canoers who can say that they have paddled the almost 400-mile length of Quebec's Rupert River.

Their trip was the culmination of years of canoeing experience.

Sadly, they will also be among the last because much of the river's pristine beauty will soon be lost. Hydro-Quebec's Nemiscau-1 Dam will divert three-fourths of its flow next year from the lower half of the river.

Nathan Kowalski, now an Amherst High School sophomore, shared his experiences about this 25-day trip sponsored by Camp Pathfinder. He was one of ten campers chosen for this extended expedition. Others were his neighbor, Phil Duggan; Evan Dent and Jordan Spear from Chicago; J.P. Carey from Delaware; T.J. Callahan from Ohio; and Canadians J.R. Mackenzie, Mike Pickfield, Robert Gooding-Townsend and Evan Woodcock. Their five leaders were Steve Szymkowiak, Kyle Warren, James Berking, Colin Bristow and Max Reis. A day-and-a-half truck trip across Quebec took the team to their starting point at a Cree Village on Lake Mistissini, the source of the Rupert River and the largest lake in the province. The lake's surface area is more than three times the total area of our Finger Lakes.

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There the 15 trippers were crammed into five canoes together with all their camping gear and food for the 22 days they would spend on the river. They had no resupply points along the route.

Although the Rupert is a big, wild river with dozens of major rapids, the Pathfinder group was not the first to paddle it. It was an historic trade route and earlier canoers had marked portages around the rapids too large to shoot. The trip leaders had also studied voyageurs' and other paddlers' accounts but even so the trails were not easy to locate and follow.

Landing at take-outs above major rapids was often exciting, Kowalski said, as these debarkation points were often so close to the wild water that each canoe team had to take great care not to get sucked into the nearby maelstroms. The photographs of Rupert rapids looked a lot like those of the Niagara River gorge.

My calculations suggest that the trip was certainly a physical challenge for these young men. To cover 400 miles in 22 days, they had to average 18 miles a day and any canoer knows that doubling on portages adds many miles to that total. Also, although they had the current running with them, there was much flatwater canoeing where the river was up to a half mile wide.

Another difficulty, Kowalski indicated, "was to find a suitable place to set up camp for the night. The river banks were hilly with many trees or tall weeds, so there was not enough clear space to set up tents." This made for a number of 12-hour days of paddling.

Kowalski and his friends are not the burly giants you might expect for such a trip. They fit the image of soccer players rather than football types. I am sure, however, that they gained strength and endurance on this challenging trip. They might not even have lost weight given the meals he described as including many "variations of macaroni and cheese, but the best included cheese fondue, tuna patties and pockets of bannock dough filled with steak, cheese, peppers and onions.

"We also had cinnamon buns a couple of mornings," he added, "a lot of bannock cheese balls for lunch and delicious peanut butter chocolate-chew bannock dough buns for dessert one night." (That last doesn't fit my definition of "delicious.")

It also rained on 17 of their 22 days on the river.

This may sound like 22 days of suffering but I received no complaints from Kowalski. Clearly he loved the trip, he liked all of his companions, and the difficulties they met made the adventure all the more attractive to him and his friends.

There were two breaks in the trip: at the dam site and at a Cree summer encampment on the lower river. The Crees were especially hospitable, opening their cabins to the travelers and sharing food with them.

A deservedly proud group finally reached the river mouth at Rupert House on James Bay.

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